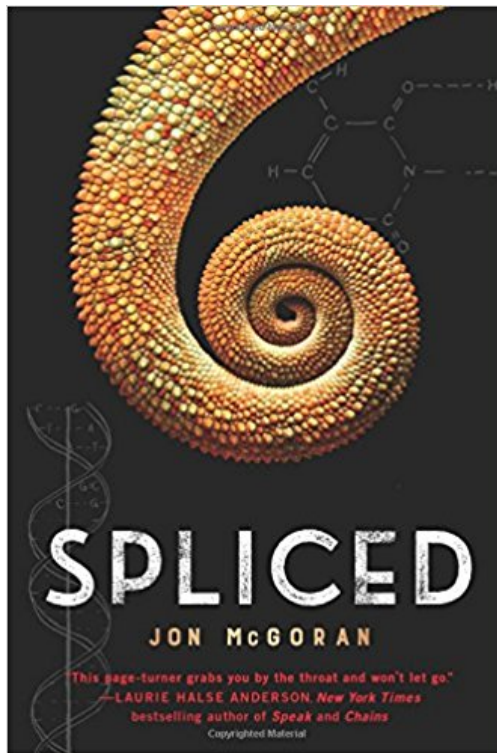


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JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

Review of *Spliced*
By Jon McGoran

Adult/Educator Reviewer: Jessica Beck
Battery Park City School, New York, NY
Student Review: Bianca Thompson, 6th Grade



McGoran, J. (2017). *Spliced*. New York, NY: Holiday House.

ISBN: 978-0823439287

Adult Review: Jessica Beck

In Jon McGoran's *Spliced*, Jimi and her best friend Del live in a society altered by climate change and transhumanist possibilities. When Del's abusive home life becomes too much to bear, he makes a risky decision to have his DNA spliced with an animal's, to leave his life behind and enter the underworld of chimeras. To save his future, Jimi launches a quest to find and rescue Del. Thus, begins the journey that takes Jimi down a dangerous road, causing her to question everything she knows about being human.

This novel has some clear strengths. The landscape of *Spliced* has the compelling features of many dystopian YA novels: crumbling suburbs, isolated communities, and mysterious underground networks. As the action mounts, the story grows more engaging. Readers will find themselves invested in some of the characters, particularly selfless Rex, and their fates. And the promise of a trilogy allows for some further exploration of the world's characteristic features, such as the WellPlant implants owned by the wealthier citizens.

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However, the larger premise of the novel seems well-intentioned, but alarmingly obtuse. McGoran's society challenges the humanity of chimeras, with citizens calling them "mixies" and eventually stripping them of their personhood. In this world, Jimi is privileged, allowing her to navigate systems that her chimera friends cannot. She can go to a hospital for treatment, take public transportation, and seek assistance from the police. It seems transparent that McGoran is pointing to larger issues of hate and marginalization in our own world. While his message is clear, that chimeras and humans are equal, his analogy is degrading.

We live in a world where disenfranchised populations have, in fact, been cast as animals devoid of humanity. Art Spiegelman's *Maus* navigates this analogy skillfully, in large part because he was crafting a memoir. When a writer crafts characters with animal features and politically familiar language to oppress them, he is asking the reader to "other" those characters. We do not experience a chimera's humanity through the eyes of a chimera, but instead through Jimi's, thus asking us (at best) to grow into a benevolent understanding of those different from us. Jimi begins to see the features of her chimera friends as beautiful--exotic, even. But certainly not human.

Mature middle school students will be able to navigate the violence and the thematic coming-of-age messages. An educator who chooses this novel for his classroom library should be prepared to have discussions with readers about point of view and context, as this novel will pose some difficult questions for students, especially students of color.

Student Review: Bianca Thompson

Jimi, the protagonist in *Spliced*, written by Jon McGoran, has a childhood is similar to that of most kids, but Del's is anything close. Stuck in a house with an abusive father, a stew of feelings, and a peculiar love of salamanders, Jimi is worried about Del. Jimi is dreading the day when Del gets pushed over the edge, and decides to do something drastic. One day, Del cracks, and her whole life falls apart. He decides to get spliced. Chimeras edit their DNA, mixing it with an animals. It used to be a fashion statement, having cool eyes, or bird feathers. Now, they are killed, because they are considered wayward and dangerous to society. As these issues come to light, new laws are passed and organizations are formed to have Chimeras officially classified as animal—therefore eliminating their human rights. Jimi can't say she disagrees. However, when Del goes missing after getting a faulty splice, her life spirals out of control. As Jimi navigates the complicated knot of the Chimera community, she learns lot about the false pretenses placed on the heads of these normal people. Jimi will find her best friend at any cost, but it might cost her everything.

This futuristic take on the classical question brings new meaning to what it means not only to be yourself, but to be a part of a larger society, what it means to be human. Jimi teaches the reader a lot about empathy and compassion. As she dives into the complexity of the Chimera community, she learns a lot about the reasons why these chimeras got spliced. Some did it for fashion. Some did it to keep up with the trends. But most did it for

a chance at a new life, a clean slate in the supposedly utopian 'Chimerica'. Most had rough childhoods, or lives they needed to escape from. They weren't cold or idiotically rebellious as portrayed by the conservative group Humanity 4 Humans. Jimi feels ashamed of the way the way her friends, her family, and even occasionally herself thought about the Chimeras as wayward trouble-makers.

Jon McGoran gives an interesting analogy for the social climate today. Many of the themes and ideas in *Spliced* are ones similar to racism, discrimination, and stereotyping. It shows many examples of the discrimination and blind hatred, from the point of view of a bystander. Jimi witnesses the stereotyping and belittling of Chimeras, and has no opinions on the issue, only that they should be avoided as they usually mean trouble. Misrepresenting people leads to many issues in this book.

Despite the positive message being sent, *Spliced* has some controversial elements. Perhaps it is due to the author's limited view point, but some may take offense to having minorities or the oppressed compared to partly 'animal' people. Since the label 'animal' has been used in the past as a derogatory statement to compare people of color with wild species, the metaphor may hit too close to home. Although likely intended to raise awareness to stereotyping and

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discrimination, *Spliced*'s analogy may be slightly insulting.

Although the beginning was slow and a bit political for a fictional book, I enjoyed reading this book, and would recommend it to those who enjoy both adventure, dystopian, or socially and morally meaningful books. While the book itself was entertaining to read, the

most striking part of this book was its message. Not only is it a journey of self-discovery and an emotional journey, but it's a wake-up-call for the issues present in our current society. *Spliced* was important and entertaining, and impacted my view discrimination and racism, both topics that are all too familiar today.